



It's Thursday, April 30. In today's issue: New Solomon Butcher photo; collecting the history of COVID-19; History Nebraska Toolkit videos; a farm boy comes to Omaha, 1888; 1900 child car seat; and Zoom into Mad Science at the Museum.

Looking closely at a "new" Solomon Butcher photo



Is it possible to find a “new” Solomon Butcher photo? A Lincoln man recently purchased this original Butcher print--and discovered that it's a previously unknown alternate shot from the legendary photographer's Custer County travels. Photograph curator Karen Keehr explains what we can learn from it. [Keep reading.](#)

Help us collect the history of COVID-19

What would you save so that people tomorrow could understand today? History Nebraska wants the public's help documenting and preserving the experiences of Nebraskans during the coronavirus pandemic. We've created a portal for Nebraskans to help identify the essential stories to share with future generations. [View it here](#), or click the screenshot below.



History Nebraska is seeking objects, photos, journal entries, and other media to document the views and responses of Nebraska individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities.

“We are living through a historic moment,” says Chris Goforth, Marketing and Communications Director for History Nebraska. “We want to document the experiences of Nebraskans during this unprecedented time for future generations to look back and learn. We’re asking Nebraskans to go to our website and tell us what they feel needs to be saved.”

History Nebraska's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha donated five dozen N95 masks to the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Thank you Ford Center staff for making this happen!

Check out our new History Nebraska Toolkit: Nebraska Unwrapped



We're bringing the Nebraska History Museum to you. In these five short videos, museum educator Jessica Stoner takes you inside the museum's "Nebraska Unwrapped" exhibit to answer a big question: Why do people come to Nebraska?

The videos and accompanying materials are designed for teachers and students... but in a sense we're all students, aren't we? We are if we stay curious.

After an introduction in the first video, Jessica shows us a traveling trunk, a sugar beet knife, a racing chair, and a windmill. [See them here.](#)

A farm boy comes to Omaha, 1888



“I guess there ain’t any end to Omaha,” wrote sixteen-year-old Frisby Rasp in a letter to his parents in 1888. “You can walk till you are tired out in any direction you choose, and the houses are as thick as ever....”

Rasp grew up on his parents’ farm in southwest Polk County, Nebraska, the oldest of six children. Now he enrolled in the Omaha Business College at 16th and Capitol Streets. He paid \$40 for tuition, and one of his teachers helped him find a boarding house. For the first time in his life, he was on his own in a big city.

Rasp’s letters over the next few months show us something that historic photographs don’t capture: how 1880s Omaha looked, sounded, and smelled to a rural Nebraskan of the time. Rasp’s portrait is vivid, though not always flattering. [Keep reading.](#)

Now this is home cooking

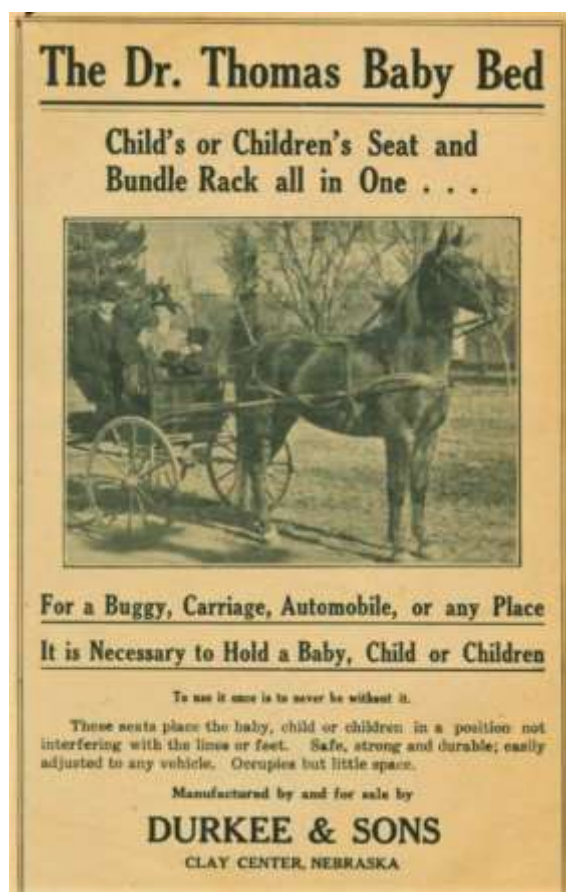


While staying at home, some people are experimenting with baking their own bread and trying new recipes. Imagine baking and cooking if your only thermostat was how hot you built your fire.

Shown here in 1996, Barbara Cizek of rural Prague loved her enamel Quick Meal Cook Stove, which she used from 1927 to 2007. With her husband James, Barbara helped husk corn, shock wheat bundles, and was involved in every aspect of the farm. She sold and dressed poultry, shipping them to Omaha's Bohemian Cafe, Stoysich's, and to restaurants as far away as Chicago. She also made down feather quilts (pexinas) and pillows, filling orders from customers across the Midwest and California.

Cizek died in 2008 at age 103. Her beloved wood-burning stove was donated to History Nebraska.

Did you know that a **predecessor of a child's car** seat was being manufactured in Clay Center in 1900? This ad appears in the White Ribbon Cookbook, published by the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Clay County, Nebraska. "To use it once is to never be without it."



Popular on our blog and social media



A recent Nebraska History Challenge item. Do you know what it is?

It's been 90 years since the Sower was raised to the top of the new Nebraska State Capitol. [Watch the video](#) digitized by History Nebraska.

Have you taken the Nebraska History Challenge? Each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday we post a photo of an object or a historic photo along with a related challenge. [Here's how it works](#). And here's a [popular recent post](#) with that thingamajig pictured above.

For some reason an old [post about Kool-Aid](#) is popular again. Is it the warm weather?

Our [newest historical marker](#) is at the Grand Island Veterans Home.

ICYMI: People are still reading about the [1918 flu pandemic](#) in Nebraska.

For #NationalBeerDay on April 7, we posted [a weird old photo](#) and some other beer-related artifacts.

It took a community effort to keep the [Missouri River from flooding Omaha](#) in 1952.

Sometimes you've just got to [saddle up your bull](#) and go for a ride.

With proper precautions taken, our [security chief inspected the Nebraska History Museum](#).

Look at this [amazing quilt pattern](#).

Join our [Preservation Month Book Club](#).



Upcoming events

Events? Really? Yes, via Zoom. Don't miss our upcoming Mad Science at the Museum events on May 6, 13, 20, and 27. [Learn more](#).

This newsletter was written by David Bristow, Editor, and Josh Lottman. history.nebraska.gov

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Complete articles:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/look-closely-previously-unknown-solomon-butcher-photo>

Look closely. This is a previously unknown Solomon Butcher photo



By David L. Bristow, Editor

Is it possible to find a “new” Solomon Butcher photo in circulation? A Lincoln man recently discovered that it is.

Today, [Solomon Devore Butcher](#) (1856-1927) is famous for his iconic Nebraska sod house photos. But during his lifetime he was little known outside of Custer and Buffalo counties. History Nebraska preserves his collection of glass plate negatives, and some of Butcher’s original photographic prints are still in circulation.

Matthew Hansen of Lincoln recently purchased an original Butcher albumen print (above) that was apparently passed down among the descendants of Charles Winfield Gibbs, who homesteaded west of Broken Bow in 1887.

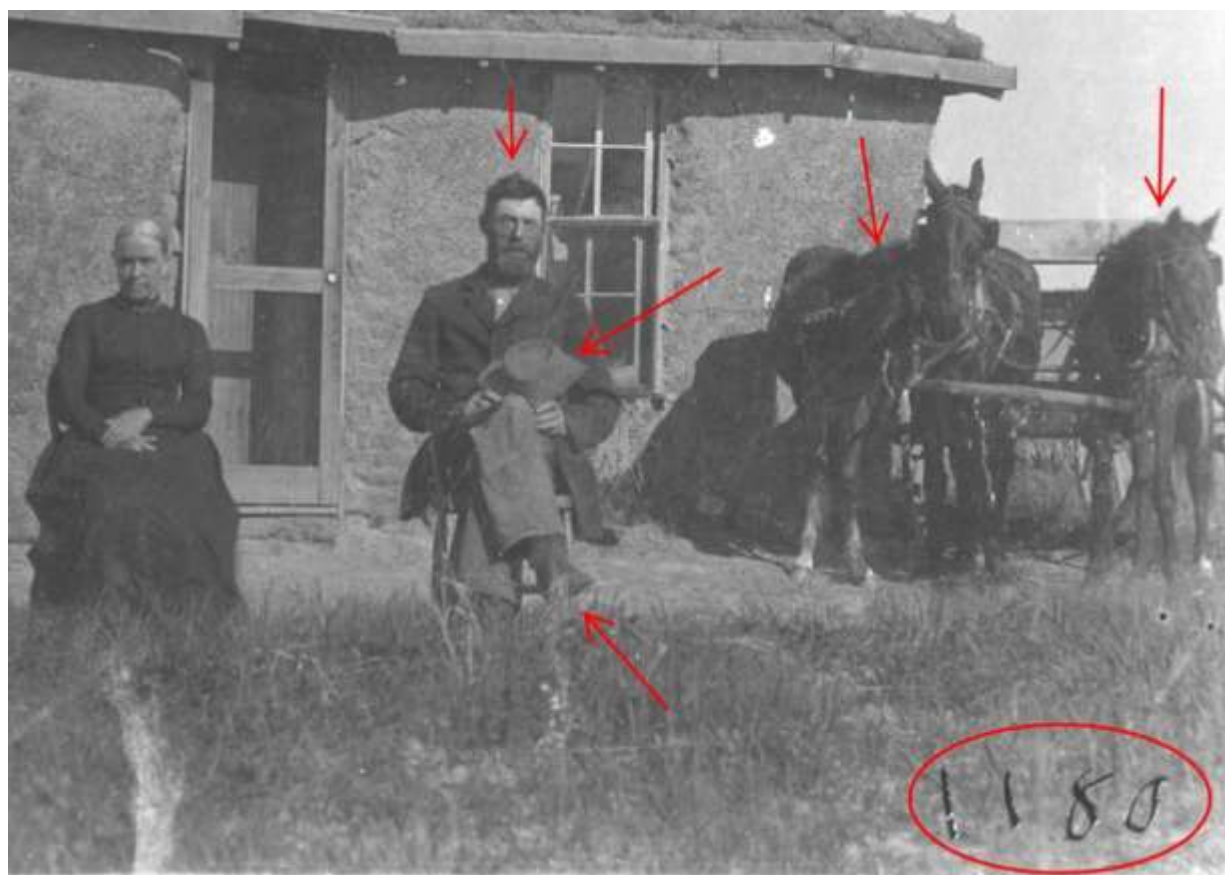
Hansen assumed that his print had been made from one of the History Nebraska negatives. History Nebraska worked with the Library of Congress to scan the collection and post it online at the LOC's "[Prairie Settlement](#)" website. Hansen looked there and thought he found the negative from which his print had been made.

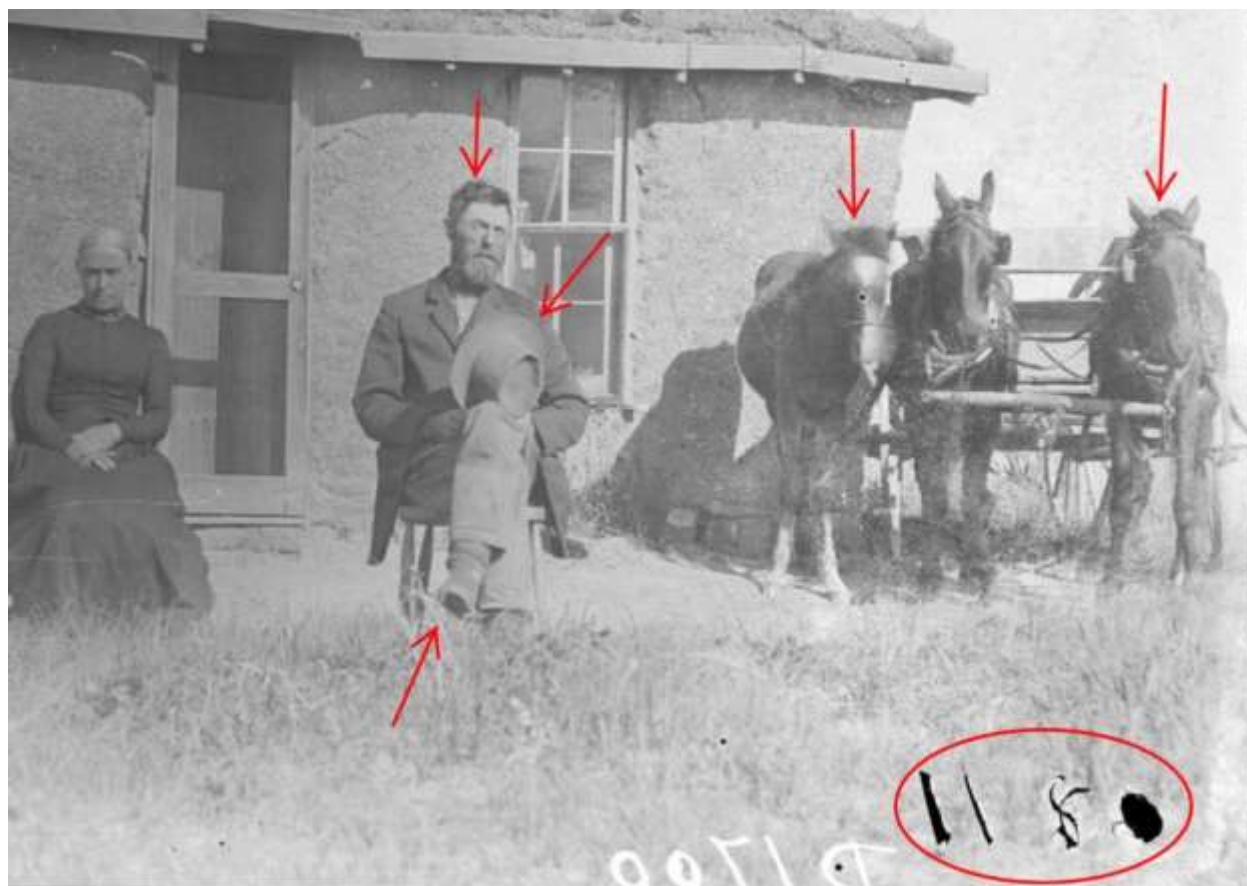
And then he looked closer. Here's the scan from Butcher's negative:



(History Nebraska RG2608-0-1700)

Do they look the same to you? Look at these versions that Hansen highlighted. Here's a detail his print, followed by a similar detail of the History Nebraska negative:





The print, Hansen realized, “had been produced by a second (non-extant) glass plate negative taken during the same session. Clearly Butcher produced more than one photographic exposure during the Gibbs photo session, but only one of the negatives has survived.”

Hansen wondered if Butcher had given the family a choice of which negative they wanted printed. Searching the Prairie Settlement website, he found only a handful of instances in which more than one negative exists from a given photo session. The whole thing was puzzling.

As Capitol Preservation Architect for the Nebraska Capitol Commission, Hansen has more than a passing interest in history. He wasn’t ready to let the matter go, so he contacted History Nebraska photograph curator Karen Keehr, who recently curated the Nebraska History Museum exhibit *Take Our Picture: Sod House Portraits by Solomon Butcher*.

Keehr wasn’t surprised that Butcher had made multiple exposures. “According to his son Lynn, Solomon was a very particular about how his subject posed in photographs and often had them move, add or subtract items until he was completely satisfied,” she said.

“As to why there isn’t a glass negative to match your print,” she continued, “there could be a variety of reasons for that. It is pretty common to have a print with no negatives for Butcher. I work closely with the Custer County Historical Society since they have a large original print collection, many of which are not represented in History Nebraska’s glass plates.

“The environment in which Butcher was working was not exactly ideal for care and transport of boxes of 6.5” x 8.5” pieces of glass. So many items were simply broken or lost along the way.

He was also working in Collodion wet plates, which of course need to be processed immediately after the images were taken, in a portable studio on the back of travel wagon... He would travel for days or weeks at a time, so he needed to be efficient with storage. My speculation is if he did take more than one image of a family, he only kept the negative he perceived as the best and washed and reused the glass at another location."

It's possible that there are other one-of-a-kind Butcher prints out there, unrecognized as such. Moral of the story: look closely and ask questions!



Butcher's father, T.J. Butcher, sits in his son's photography wagon near Westerville, Custer County, in 1887.

As a postscript to this story, Hansen learned something else by looking closely. He writes:

“After intensely studying these Butcher negatives of the Charles Winfield Gibbs homestead, I was later looking through more of the Butcher collection images and recognized the little boy and white pony in a previously-unidentified Butcher image (RG2608-0-1363).

“It turns out that this was the family of Charles Winfield Gibbs son Melvin Alonzo Gibbs on their homestead (NW ¼, Sec 22 T17N R21W) just a couple miles north of the C.W. Gibbs homestead. The little boy in both images is Arthur Melvin Gibbs (1886-1952), the son of Melvin Alonzo Gibbs and grandson of Charles Winfield Gibbs, who ended up being photographed by Butcher at both his father’s and grandfather’s homesteads.”

Here are the two photos, labeled by Hansen, with little Arthur Gibbs:





(4/30/2020)

<https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/farm-boy-comes-omaha-1888>

A Farm Boy Comes to Omaha, 1888



(Photo: Looking east along Farnam Street, Omaha, 1889. History Nebraska RG2341-28)

By David L. Bristow, Editor

“I guess there ain’t any end to Omaha,” wrote sixteen-year-old Frisby Rasp in a letter to his parents in 1888. “You can walk till you are tired out in any direction you choose, and the houses are as thick as ever...”

Rasp grew up on his parents’ farm in southwest Polk County, Nebraska, the oldest of six children. Now he enrolled in the Omaha Business College at 16th and Capitol Streets. He paid \$40 for tuition, and one of his teachers helped him find a boarding house. For the first time in his life, he was on his own in a big city.

“Big city” is relative. That year’s Omaha City Directory claimed a population of 125,000, a huge (and probably exaggerated) jump over the 30,000 counted in the 1880 census.

But it seemed big enough to Frisby. Even the post office on the northeast corner of 15th and Capitol was enormous, “a large three story stone [building]. It covers half a block. They receive over a carload of mail every day.”



(Omaha’s post office in 1888. History Nebraska RG2341-0-247)

He was writing on May 6, one day after he arrived. In his May 7 letter he reminded his family that “I haven’t got any letters yet,” but hoped there’d be one waiting for him at the big post

office. He admitted he'd been "feeling pretty lonely." Two days later he complained, "I haven't heard from you yet; you must be dead. I ain't a going to mail this until I do hear." Two more long days passed before he received his long-awaited letters from home.

Rasp's own letters over the next few months show us something that historic photographs don't capture: how 1880s Omaha looked, sounded, and smelled to a rural Nebraskan of the time. Rasp's portrait is vivid, though not always flattering.

"Every thing here is coal smoke and dirt and people," he wrote soon after his arrival.

"It is dusty just as soon as it quits raining," he added later, "and the dust here is the worst dust I ever saw. It is all stone and manure. Streets that ain't paved, 2 feet deep of mud."

Omaha was just beginning to pave its main streets. Rasp marveled at the "great steam roller" working in front of the college. But he soon tired of all the noise.

"I am getting so I hate to hear an engine," he wrote on May 9. There must be at least 50 at work beside[s] the factories, and they never stop, night or day. It is puff-puff-puff-puff-toot-toot-toot-braw-braw-braw-puff-puff-puff-puff."

He was overwhelmed by the crowds and anonymity. "I have seen more people since I came here than every person I ever saw before I came and with a few exceptions I never see the same person twice...." The nationwide bicycle craze was underway and Rasp saw so many that "I am sick a looking at them."

Omaha was filthy by a country boy's standards. On May 16 he promised to come home on a visit "and quit breathing smoke and drinking filth." A few days later he added that "the water is full of sewerage. I haven't drank a drop of water for a week. I don't drink anything but coffee. The coffee hides the filth...."

The Rasp family was deeply religious, and Frisby was shocked by Omaha's vice. "Every other store is a saloon," he wrote before adding a quick reassurance: "but I never even looked in one...."

"This is an awful wicked town," he noted several days later. "The saloons run on sunday [*sic*] and most all work goes right on." A "bad house" operated next door to the college, and another brothel stood on the corner across from his boarding house. Even local newspapers, he wrote, claimed that if you shut down all the saloons, brothels, and tobacco shops, half of Omaha's businesses would be gone.

Even so, when Rasp toured the county jail he seemed disappointed to report that "there was nobody in yesterday."

Rasp was an ardent tourist of local institutions. He marveled at the steam printing press at the *Omaha Republican* ("the fastest printing I ever saw"), witnessed "1000 carloads of lead and the biggest engine I ever saw" at the lead smelting plant, toured the city's electrical power plant (another "largest engine I ever saw," powering lights that are "40 times as good as gas"), and rode the elevator in a six-story hotel ("it is a beauty").



(Omaha-Grant Smelting Co., December 29, 1902. History Nebraska RG3474-2038)

For all his complaining he seemed to be enjoying himself. He just didn't want to stay.

"I wouldn't live in the City always for anything," he wrote. "Get an education there and a good start in life and then let me have a farm."

Which is pretty much what he did. After graduation he worked as a bookkeeper in Omaha for two years, and later served as a business college instructor in York and a pastor in Wayland, but spent most of his life on a farm near Gresham. He and his wife, Mattie, raised seven children on the farm, and Rasp died there in 1948. His daughter Naomi Rasp Frederickson donated his letters to History Nebraska; edited and introduced by Sherrill Daniels, they were first **published in** *Nebraska History Magazine* in 1990.

This story first appeared in the May 2019 issue of NEBRASKAland Magazine.

Learn more about Frisby Rasp in the History Nebraska archives: [RG4522.AM: Frisby Leonard Rasp Collection](#)